



THE BLUEPRINT

Virtual Town Hall



COVID-19 and the Impact on Visitation

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall

September 29, 2020

Transcript

Speaker: Dr. Gerry White

Dr. Gerry White ([00:00](#)):

One of the things I'm excited about as we look at this world called visitation and father involvement and engagement, we know for the last 20, 30 years, there's been an effort and a push to increase the amount of father involvement. All the research is consistent that shows that the child wellbeing is substantially better when a child is involved in a healthy relationship with his father.

Dr. Gerry White ([00:40](#)):

Now, we do recognize that not all relationships end the same, many relationships end in divorce and separation, but that just often means that the relationship has ended, but not the parenting roles of those two adults. And why am I highlighting this? Because, one of the things that we recognize that is critical, is a father's ability to remain involved in his child's life. But something happened this year with the impact of COVID-19, and what that has done, it has literally changed the entire world and how we interact and engage with one another with the COVID constantly moving and impacting the lives at the individual level, family and community and national level, that everything is being required to change.

Dr. Gerry White ([01:30](#)):

So brother Braswell one of the things that's a challenge even right now, is that when we look at how courts are operating now. They're using Zoom, they're not holding real live court sessions other than through this manner. Well, with all of these adjustments, and even as a college professor, we're not teaching physically in the classroom, everything is online and virtual.

Dr. Gerry White ([01:55](#)):

Well, there's another issue that is often neglected and that is father's involvement and issues of visitation. Now, COVID-19 and the impact of visitation, on one hand it's an absolute critical concern in terms of whether or not a father can be involved with his child, with his children, while taken under consideration issues of COVID-19.

Dr. Gerry White ([02:23](#)):



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Now, one of the things that I recognize is that a lot of times when they talked about who was particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, they talked about people with pre-existing health conditions. So diabetes, high blood pressure and other areas, those people are adversely impacted by COVID-19. Well, there's another pre-existing health condition and that other preexisting health condition is the health of the family. And so here's the challenge in visitation and involvement during times of COVID-19. If the relationship in of itself was already vulnerable, then we run the risk of something like COVID-19 creating a possibility or an opportunity of delaying or preventing a father from being involved with his child.

Dr. Gerry White ([03:12](#)):

And so we were doing the work and recognizing that we have to really take this opportunity to visit that, because these other medias, such as Zoom and other video conferencing opportunities, to some degree this becomes an avenue that we want to encourage individuals to begin to focus on in terms of increasing the involvement. We also recognize in terms of the pre-existing health condition of the family, that this is also a critical time where fathers and mothers can begin to revisit that relationship, to really get it to a point so that when a father is clear on the conditions and he's practicing his health conditions and she's practicing her health conditions so that a father can in fact get that child.

Dr. Gerry White ([04:03](#)):

Now, where there are existing visitation orders and existing laws that are in place, nothing has changed. If the order says a father can get that child on the first, third and fifth weekend of the month, well, that really doesn't change much because the law hasn't adjusted, but this here now more than ever, is the time for the relationship, that co-parenting relationship or that parallel parenting relationship, to be revisited. Children still benefit from the bond and the connection, and so the work that we've got to do right now, it's constantly to get those fathers and those mothers to understand and use these mediums to increase that involvement.

Dr. Gerry White ([04:48](#)):

So, to that end, there's a couple of things that I want to promote. Number one, getting fathers to communicate with those mothers. And here's the thing and the beautiful thing about the block family, sometimes that connection may not happen with the mother, but it could happen with the mother's brother, the uncle, the grandparents, or the parents. So we have to consider the other elements within the family to get the dialogue and the communication going.

Dr. Gerry White ([05:16](#)):

Number two, a father must keep himself available in terms of the times. Now, because of this system, a father can help the child with the homework. Now within this system, a father can watch videos and engage in other activities. So we want to know if that regard increase the amount of direct involvement that a father has with the children in this setting.



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Dr. Gerry White ([05:43](#)):

Number three, for the father this is an opportunity for himself to look within himself in terms of the amount of commitment that he has also had to his children. Here's what we know, that there's a model that I'm always pushing that says start with myself then the family, cover the block on to the community. And so what does that mean? In terms of the community and the family to truly be in a better place, he must start with himself. That means taking the opportunity to look at yourself emotionally and spiritually, to understand and investigate what you need to do to improve yourself. And then even your boys in your family, get to the point where you can ask them, "What can I do to be a better father in this regard.?"

Dr. Gerry White ([06:31](#)):

Also within that context, we're having a conversation about him working with that relationship with that mother. We want to promote that as an opportunity, even if they were never committed or never connected to that degree, we do know in terms of visitation and involvement, we've got to do the work to make that happen.

Dr. Gerry White ([06:51](#)):

Now there are finally, number four, some things that still can take place during this time, he still can use the internet to find those mechanisms in terms of what a virtual visitation plan looks like. He can negotiate and send that type of communication to the mother. "Look, let's set these times up." Of course, all of this is relevant based on the ages and the stages for which the child is in. So if he's got a teenager, then quite often, that dialogue and communication can occur directly between him and that child. But if he's got a younger person, well, this is where that negotiation with the custodial parent that's going to be absolutely critical.

Dr. Gerry White ([07:33](#)):

We want to restore, we want to rebuild and we want to reconnect the family. And fathers, I'm going to tell you, it really starts with you. It really starts with the level of involvement that you want to give. Here's the truth. Every man who has a child makes a personal private promise to himself to be a better father than his father was to him. And I'm going to tell you this, even those fathers who had great relationship with their fathers, they still want a better relationship and to be a better father to their children.

Dr. Gerry White ([08:08](#)):

So I invite men to examine that, to examine those things and draw from those things that you wish, anything that you wished was present in your life, in terms of your father, as a child, I'm going to challenge you and invite you to bring those things into your present day life. But I'm also going to challenge you and invite you to look at some of the challenges and those deficits that you did not see that occurred in your life and then make a commitment that you don't carry those things on.



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Dr. Gerry White ([08:40](#)):

So, visitation can occur, commitment can occur, but it starts with self. And from self you improve family, and from family on to block and ultimately onto the community.

